



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremić

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 17, 2007

The United States welcomes the Foreign Minister to his first Permanent Council appearance and also welcomes the opportunity to express our appreciation for the outstanding support and cooperation your government has always given to the OSCE Mission in Serbia. In our view, the Mission helps support Serbia in its reform path to Euro-Atlantic integration. It does vital work with your government, supporting dialogue between Belgrade and various ethnic communities in Southern Serbia and helping integrate members of those communities into state institutions.

We hope you agree that the OSCE Mission headquartered in Pristina is working equally to promote inter-ethnic reconciliation and to monitor, protect, and promote the human rights and welfare of the ethnic Serb community in Kosovo. We expect this important work of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo to continue even after Kosovo's final status is resolved.

Your presence here today offers a valuable opportunity for candor. The debate over Kosovo's future has become a source of some friction between your government and states like the United States and members of the European Union that believe there is no viable alternative other than for Kosovo to be independent, subject to a period of international supervision.

We regret this tension, and wish to avoid a situation where our differences on this issue lead to worsening relations and overshadow the many areas where our countries work well together. The United States considers itself a friend of Serbia. We remain committed to expanding and deepening our ties to the people and government of Serbia.

We understand the Serbian Government's position on Kosovo's status. But we disagree with it. Following the events of the 1990s surrounding the dissolution of Yugoslavia, we do not see how it is possible for Kosovo and Serbia to remain in the same state. Yugoslavia's breakup has been traumatic for the entire region, but we now have an opportunity to ensure that Kosovo's statehood comes about in as controlled a way as possible. We have embraced all the other new nation states resulting from Yugoslavia's collapse here in the OSCE and look forward to doing the same for Kosovo.

Our position is no different from that of the European Union, the majority of UN Security Council members, and most of the international community. We all believe the Ahtisaari

plan, including his recommendation of supervised independence for Kosovo, is the best path forward for Serbia, Kosovo and the entire region.

Some argue that allowing Kosovo to become independent would establish a dangerous international precedent.

But Kosovo is clearly a special case, with a special combination of factors that has not been repeated elsewhere.

UN Special Envoy Ahtisaari has already conducted over a year and a half of negotiations on status and his proposal for supervised independence contains extremely broad protections for Kosovo's Serb and other non-Albanian communities. He has done exactly what the Contact Group asked him to do. This plan, endorsed by the UN Secretary General and the European Union, is a blueprint for a more stable, prosperous and multi-ethnic Kosovo.

Some countries have proposed a new period of intensive engagement in which the parties would continue to seek common ground. This would be acceptable to the United States, but we should bear in mind that the Ahtisaari plan will certainly be on the table. We would encourage the Serbian government to take advantage of any new period to discuss how to best implement the Ahtisaari plan and make certain that the rights of Kosovo Serbs are fully protected in an independent Kosovo.

What we cannot accept is indefinite delay. The status quo is obviously not sustainable. The international community -- particularly the UN, EU and NATO -- is spending enormous amounts of financial and human resources in an effort to provide security and oversee the governance of Kosovo. Kosovo's uncertain status has had devastating effects on its economy and prevented its people from assuming full ownership over their institutions. The time to solve this conflict is now.

We would like to repeat what U.S. Ambassador Polt in Belgrade said on June 26th in a speech commemorating the 60th Anniversary of the Marshall plan. He advised Serbia "to let Kosovo go. It's not coming back. Work with Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo to help an independent and multi-ethnic Kosovo to be the best country it can be and friend to a strong and successful Serbia." Serbia is a great nation with whom the United States has historically had good relations. We need to capitalize on a common vision of a region at peace where the rights of all are protected.

Should Serbia seize this opportunity, Mr. Minister, we can promise that the OSCE's field missions in Serbia and Kosovo will continue to be there to facilitate the journey.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.